

INTERVIEWING TIPS & TECHNIQUES

One of the key duties of a financial worker is to interview clients. Interviewing provides an opportunity for both the worker and the client to seek and give information.

Most interviews occur at the time of application and recertification. However anytime you and your client communicate, whether it is over the phone or face to face, essentially you are conducting an interview.

Program Requirements

FS, GA, MSA, GRH:

There must be an interview with an applicant or when a recertification is due for a recipient. There is no requirement that this interview be held in the office. If an in-office interview is not held, the county must arrange for a phone interview or a face-to-face interview at a location mutually agreed upon by the county and the client.

The Food Support program requires applicants to complete either a face-to-face or a telephone interview.

The health care programs do not require either an in-person or telephone interview for eligibility. Those applicants may request an interview but it is not an eligibility requirement. Applicants may submit applications, verifications and receive eligibility determinations through the mail.

Tools for Interviewing

[Combined Application Form \(CAF\)](#) – used to record information gathered in the application interview. Some of the questions pertain to all programs and some are program specific.

[The CAF Workbook](#) – gives a detailed description of each CAF question with suggested proofs and manual references, and a section on commonly used forms.

[CAF Interview Desk Reference Guide](#) – summarizes the follow-up types of information to request depending on applicants' responses to CAF questions. It also lists the programs and MAXIS panels that apply to each question.

[Worker Interview Form \(WIF\)](#) – used to record information gathered in the application interview. Each numbered question on the CAF has a corresponding question on the WIF with some follow-up questions. It includes the MAXIS panels that apply to each question. It is an optional form. Ask your supervisor if your county uses this form.

INTERVIEWING TIPS & TECHNIQUES

Purpose of Interviewing

Interviewing gives applicants the opportunity to gain an understanding of the agency, programs, benefits, and the requirements they must meet to satisfy program guidelines. It also resolves questions that the client may have about agency policies and procedures.

Interviewing also provides an opportunity to educate clients about other services that agencies may offer such as social or public health services. Workers may offer to refer clients to other resources that may be helpful to them such as energy or housing assistance, veteran services, WIC clinics, counseling or transportation services.

In an interview, clients have the opportunity to present information in their own words. This may give you a better understanding of their situation than you would have by just reviewing the information on the CAF.

Interviewing serves to secure the information that the agency needs in order to determine eligibility, and deepens a client's understanding of their rights and responsibilities in this process.

Client Interactions

Among the most important traits for a successful interviewer are empathy, communication and professionalism. Combined they reassure the client of fair and impartial treatment. This may result in clients having confidence in you as a worker and that they will receive all benefits for which they are eligible.

Clients are asked personal questions followed by requests for verifications of private information that they probably don't divulge to close friends. Acting with sensitivity and tactfulness is essential for easing a client's concerns. Generally, following the "Golden Rule" of treating others as you would wish to be treated is your best route.

Here are some key points to remember about interacting with clients.

- Realize that people react to personal questions differently. Some people may be open to personal questions while others may find them offensive or invasive.
- Recognize and eliminate barriers that may surface because of age, gender, language and racial differences.
- Attitudes towards authority can influence a client's interaction with you.
- The elderly, disabled or illiterate client may require more time or assistance. Check with your supervisor to find out your agency's procedure for communicating via TTY or if you need an interpreter.

INTERVIEWING TIPS & TECHNIQUES

- Illiteracy may be demonstrated by a client repeatedly forgetting glasses, leaving many questions blank, or coming in regularly for help with forms.
- Generally a worker should not help a client fill out forms if that client is on their caseload or for whom they will be making an eligibility decision. Check with your supervisor to find out what your agency's procedure is for someone to help one of your clients with filling out forms.
- Give the client verbal as well as the required written instruction. Respect the client's level of ability to participate in the application process.
- Workers do not have to put up with abuse, such as bad language, physical threats, violence, etc. Check with your supervisor for specific procedures to deal with any kind of abuse.

INTERVIEWING TIPS & TECHNIQUES

Techniques for Effective Questioning

Open-ended Questions

Open-ended questions allow for a full and spontaneous response – not just a yes or no answer. They encourage the communication of thoughts and feelings.

Advantages – Open-ended questions:

- Encourage more client participation.
- Provide more complete explanation of answers.
- Gather more information.

Disadvantages – Open-ended questions:

- Allow the client to ramble.
- Take more time.
- Rely on the client's priorities.
- May result in some unnecessary, irrelevant information.

Examples:

- Tell me about your situation.
- Tell me about the work that you do.
- Tell me about the money you received last month.
- Tell me how you paid the rent.

Closed-Ended Questions

Closed-ended questions allow for directed responses so the interview may be shorter. Generally closed-ended questions allow for a yes or no answer only.

Advantages: Closed-ended questions:

- Shorten the interview time.

Disadvantages: Closed-ended questions:

- Allow for little client participation.
- Eliminate explanations and therefore information.
- May appear to be an interrogation.

Examples:

- What type of bank accounts do you have?
- How many hours do you work?
- How many people live with you?

INTERVIEWING TIPS & TECHNIQUES

Key Elements of Professional Interviewing

Preparation:

- Know your material and define your own comfort level.
- Prepare your interview space. Clear your desk of confidential or private information such as other cases or information about other cases.
- Clarify the purpose of the interview, such as determining eligibility for assistance.
- Review the questions and answers on the application prior to the interview if possible.
- Have all necessary paperwork and forms for the interview close at hand. For example, because clients do not usually turn in all required proofs with the application, you will most likely need a Verification Request Form.
- Clear your head. Be prepared to give the client your undivided attention. You may be nervous or new to the agency. Calmly consider what you will need to do during the interview. Advance preparation will eliminate stress and anxiety.
- Don't count on your memory to recall their answers. Use the CAF and the CAF Interview Desk Reference Guide during the interview to document the information.

Introduction and Greeting:

- Don't keep the client waiting.
- Greet your client as you would like to be greeted if you were applying for assistance.
- Introduce yourself. Ask how they wish to be addressed, and continue to address them in that manner throughout the interview. (First name, title, etc.)
- This is the first opportunity for you to establish the direction of the interview; use it well.
- Welcome the client to the interview area and define the goals to be achieved during the interview.
- Assure privacy in the interview to the extent possible.

Purpose of the Interview:

- Establish the client's needs and wants. Ease any discomfort or concerns they may have.
- Describe to the client what is going to happen during the interview.
- Tell the client how much time will be required to successfully complete the interview.

INTERVIEWING TIPS & TECHNIQUES

- Explain confidentiality and client responsibility thoroughly. Make sure the client has a solid understanding of both.
- Inform client that you will answer questions and provide information about available programs and services.

Clarification:

- Make sure the client understands what you are saying and that you understand what the client is saying.
- Avoid jargon, terminology and acronyms unless you define it for the client.
- Formulate your questions well. As discussed earlier, ask open-ended questions. Avoid questions that may be answered with a yes or no response.
- Restate the question if it is unclear. For example: the application asks the client to report their race and ethnicity. For some the answer to that question is not as cut and dried as it may seem on the application. You could ask the client to describe their racial and ethnic background in their own words. By gathering information in the client's own words, you will be able to determine the best way to answer these questions.
- Listen to the client's response.
- Don't assume too much. Don't be afraid to ask questions or make statements in order to clarify information. When something doesn't make sense, ask for an explanation.

Provide Information:

- Describe the application. Be prepared to explain why applications ask some questions even though they do not affect eligibility for public assistance programs such as race, ethnicity, last grade completed, which are used for statistical purposes or for federal reporting/funding requirements.
- Thoroughly explain program policies and procedures.
- Provide information about other available resources.

Conclusion:

- Review what you and the client need to do and what happens next.
- If requesting verifications, use DHS-2919A & B, or DHS-3271 for health care applicants.
- Let your clients know where they can reach you. Provide your name, office phone number, office hours, and protected time in case they have follow-up questions.

INTERVIEWING TIPS & TECHNIQUES

- Allow clients to ask any final questions. Give them the opportunity to add comments if they feel the need.
- End on a pleasant note and show the client out.

Follow-up

Interviewing is an important aspect of the application process. Another important aspect is the follow-up: obtaining verifications and documentation.

Verifications

Verifications, also known as proofs, are the evidence used to establish the accuracy or completeness of eligibility information. This means that clients may need to provide documentation from a third party or other source that shows proof the client's reported information is correct. For health care program applicants, people may only need to provide additional documentation when electronic verification is not sufficient.

Guidelines

Providing verifications is primarily the responsibility of the client. Clients must cooperate by providing either necessary verifications or written consent for you to obtain the verification from a third party.

- Use DHS-2919A & B or DHS-3271 Verification Request Forms to request information or verifications necessary to determine initial or continued program eligibility.
- Refer to the Combined Manual, the Health Care Programs Manual or Insurance Affordability Programs Manual for information about timelines for clients to return requested verifications.
- Do not require more than one type of proof for the same eligibility factor.
- Mandatory Verifications - All programs require verification of certain information. All three manuals have chapters that tell you the types of verifications that are mandatory to determine eligibility.
- Some proofs are one-time only meaning that the client provides them once, usually at initial application. The proofs are then retained for the life of the case files so that the client does not have to provide them again.
- Other proofs must be obtained to update case information at renewal or at the time a change in circumstances may occur. Generally these proofs may be retained in the case file for three years.

INTERVIEWING TIPS & TECHNIQUES

- Inconsistent Information – Request verification if information provided by an applicant or enrollee is inconsistent with:
 - Other information on file; or
 - The applicant's or enrollee's own statements; or
 - Information collected in other ways such as a case review.
- Assist clients with obtaining verifications if they are unable to provide them. Authorization forms are available on eDocs to obtain the client's written consent before contacting third parties for verification.
- Deny or terminate assistance for clients who refuse or deliberately fail to cooperate in verifying information.
 - Be sure to require client to complete only those items necessary to determine eligibility for the program(s) the client is requesting.
 - Be sure to allow the full processing period for clients to provide verifications for applications.